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ABSTRACT

Faculty members at 58 institutions belonging to the Academy of Human Resource Development (AHRD) were surveyed to identify trends in the use of Internet courses in graduate human resource development (HRD) programs. Of the 27 institutions that submitted valid responses, 10 offered Internet courses in HRD and 17 did not. Of the 17 that did not, 2 planned to add Internet courses in the future. Among the reasons given for not offering Internet courses were the following: not enough time to develop courses; lack of experience to develop Internet courses; lack of time to deliver and administer courses; lack of equipment; and insufficient student demand. The following policies and procedures related to Internet courses were in place by at least some of the schools offering Internet courses in HRD: technical support; instructional design support; intellectual property right of developer; release time to develop courses; and smaller course loads for teaching Internet courses. The respondents from schools offering Internet courses reported that lack of the following items posed problems: experience, staff, security for course and student information, location for an on-campus network, and equipment. Six advantages and 11 disadvantages of Internet courses were identified. (Contains 16 references.) (MN)

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The Use of Internet Courses in HRD Programs

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This poster presents the findings of a survey of AHRD members in an attempt to identify the use of Internet courses in Graduate HRD Programs. Of 27 valid responses, 10 offered Internet courses and 17 did not. Of these 17, two planned to add Internet courses in the future. Advantages and disadvantages, reasons for not offering Internet courses, problems in establishing Internet courses, and Internet related policies are displayed.

Keywords: Internet Courses, Web-Based Courses, Distance Learning

One of the major innovations in human resource development is the use of Internet courses as indicated in a recent ASTD National HRD Executive Survey on Learning technologies. Respondents projected that by the year 2000, 35 percent of all training will be delivered by learning technologies, and the projected top three learning technologies will be Multimedia, LAN/WAN, and the Internet/World Wide Web (ASTD, 1997). Today, many universities are changing the way they conduct programs or offer curriculum "to meet the customer's needs, to compete with other institutions and possibly even to survive" (Nixon 1998, p54). With the help of information technology, many universities are now offering Internet courses.

Those courses take advantage of information technology and are more flexible on the time and place for learning and teaching. Hence, the Internet is truly a different environment for learning and teaching. There are many questions that need to be answered. "What is different about the Web place for teaching and learning? What wisdom or knowledge might guide us in learning how to teach and learn in the new place? What design guidelines should we use" (Boettcher 1998, p45)?

Significance of the Study

This study was significant in that it helped identify the current use of Internet courses in HRD Academic Programs. It provides HRD faculty members insight into what other Universities are doing so they can keep programs current and competitive. It helped identify some of the problems that departments and faculty members had in setting up Internet courses, which should make it easier for others to develop these courses in the future. The addition of Internet courses should make graduate HRD programs more accessible to those students who have schedule or location conflicts.

Research Methodology

This was a descriptive study where questionnaires were sent to faculty members at 58 institutions and 32 (55% response rate) were returned. The first member from each university listed in the membership directory of the Academy of HRD was selected. Five questionnaires were eliminated due to incomplete responses. The final sample consisted of 27 universities that offered HRD related programs. These universities were divided into two groups for data analysis and interpretation purposes. One group included 17 universities that did not offer Internet courses in HRD graduate programs, and the other included 10 universities that offered Internet courses in HRD graduate programs.

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Related Literature

With the help of information technology, the Internet and the World Wide Web became a new environment for teaching and learning. Internet courses are the products of these two technologies. Some define Internet courses as "Distance Education Via the Internet"(Verbrugge, 1997).

Advantages of Internet Courses

The Internet provides some advantages that other distance learning methods can not offer and has the potential to compete with traditional learning methods. Advantages of Internet courses include the following:

1. Time and place flexibility. Students can log onto a class whenever and wherever they want. An instructor can work with colleagues from other locations, and institutions may cooperate with each other to share learning resources (Wulf, 1996; Glener, 1996).
2. Multi-platform capability. Using Hypertext Markup Language (HTML), and TCP/IP protocol, barriers between operating systems are reduced (Wulf, 1996; Kruse, 1997).
3. Easy, affordable distribution. Using the Internet to access course content can reduce the cost of delivering and producing learning materials (Wulf, 1996, Kruse, 1997).
4. Up-to-date content. Text and graphics can be updated in minutes, and current information can be provided, which cannot be done with video and CD-Rom (Wulf, 1996; Kruse, 1997).
5. Learner control. Students have more control of their pace and can ask for help while applying what they are learning (Wulf, 1996). "The idea of static, linear training programs has changed to a fluid and individualized learning model"(Glener, 1996, p57).
6. Potential to reach a global market. Students can access learning materials even if they are geographically isolated from training institutions (Armstrong, 1996).

Disadvantages of Internet Courses

While Internet courses provide many advantages, they also have disadvantages. These can reduce student participation, and instructor and institutional development

1. Changing nature of technology. Using video on the Internet is limited by bandwidth. The reliability of an Internet address can interrupt the learning process and affect the learning performance. Network systems are becoming more complex (Wulf, 1996; Pritchard, 1998).
2. Reliance on student initiative. Compared to traditional courses, students are more responsible for maintaining their motivation and desire to learn . Therefore, self-motivation will affect the learners' and programs' success (Wulf, 1996; Black, 1997).
3. Faculty workload. In a traditional classroom a faculty-student conversation during a class break may take 30 seconds. However, in an Internet course the student can be anywhere at anytime and information is exchanged by e-mail. This may take 2 to 3 minutes so the faculty workload may increase dramatically (Boettcher, 1998).
4. New mode of training. The Internet and World Wide Web still are new environments for trainers. Determining the appropriate training style is still a problem. Also, there is a change in the relationship between teacher and students (Westera, 1999).
5. Copyright issue. "Fair Use" has not been defined for the Internet, and putting course material on a web site may violate copyright law (Gallick 1998).
6. Accreditation. The value and prestige of a degree is based in part on the accreditation of the program and institution. Some virtual universities have no physical campus. It is hard to apply current standards to virtual universities and online courses (Gallick, 1998).
7. Privacy. In the world of the electronic network, information is transfered through a series of servers and all the servers keep a log within their database (Descy, 1997).
8. Information Overload. Most information sources students find through a web search engine are not well organized. When students search for a specific term, they may find many thousands of matches. Teachers and students need to put much effort into evaluating the accuracy and the reliability of the information found on the Internet (Descy, 1997).
9. Academic Honesty. Gray points out that with the Web-based instructional tools available today, instructors have more ways of controlling the testing environment (1998).

10. Intellectual Property. Boettcher stated that "it is important that we find ways to acknowledge the right of a faculty member to his/her own work, and the right of an institution for reasonable access to the work of faculty members" (1999, p. 36).
11. Completion Rates. Parks, a web-based training designer has found that up to 50 percent of learners are not finishing online-learning modules (1999).

Findings and Poster Exhibition

The major findings from this study are presented in the following four tables. These four tables will be presented on two posters for this session. A narrative description is also provided for some of the other survey questions.

Reasons Universities do not Offer Internet Courses

Table 1.
Reasons For not Offering Internet Courses (n= 17)

REASONS	Number	Percent
Not enough time to develop courses	13	76.4
Lack of experience to develop Internet courses	10	58.8
Lack of time to deliver and administrate courses	8	47.0
Lack of equipment	5	29.4
Not enough demand by student	3	17.6
No security for course and student information	2	11.8
Lack of location for on campus network	1	5.9

Internet Related Policies and Procedures

Table 2.
Policies and Procedures Related to Internet Courses (n= 10)

SCHOOL POLICES	Number	Percent
Technical support	7	70
Instructional design support	5	50
Intellectual property right of developer	3	30
Release time to develop courses	3	30
Smaller courses loads for teaching Internet courses	2	20

Problems in Setting up Internet Courses

Internet courses were most often developed by the instructors, and seldom or rarely developed by graduate assistants or outside providers. All ten respondents indicated their Internet courses always included text and interactive exercise and 90% of them had hyperlinks to external web site. A limited number included audio or video components. The relationship between experience and perceived advantages, perceived disadvantages and problems in setting up Internet courses should be examined.

Table 3.
Problems in Setting Up Internet Courses (n= 10)

PROBLEMS	Number	Percent
Lack of experience	6	60
Lack of staff	5	50
Security for course and student information	4	40
Lack of location for on campus network	3	30
Lack of equipment	2	20

Advantages and Disadvantages of Internet Courses

Table 4.
Perceived Advantages and Disadvantage of Internet Courses (n= 10)

ADVANTAGES	SA	A	U	D	SD	NR	μ
Time and place flexibility	8	2	0	0	0	0	1.20
Potential to reach global audience	7	2	1	0	0	0	1.40
Multi-platform capability	3	4	3	0	0	0	2.00
Opportunity for interaction	5	1	2	1	1	0	2.20
Easy to update	3	4	2	0	1	0	2.20
Learner has more control	3	4	1	2	0	0	2.20
DISADVANTAGES	SA	A	U	D	SD	NR	μ
Increase faculty workload	6	3	0	1	0	0	1.60
Gray area for copyright law	3	1	3	3	0	0	2.60
Need to develop new mode of training	1	5	0	4	0	0	2.70
Limited bandwidth	1	1	5	2	0	1	2.89
Unreliable Internet links	1	2	2	5	0	0	3.10
Student Lack of Internet skill or computer skill	0	3	3	4	0	0	3.10
More reliance on student initiative	0	3	2	5	0	0	3.20
Instructor Lack of Internet skill or computer skill	0	3	3	2	2	0	3.30

SA= Strongly Agree, A= Agree, U= Undecided, D= Disagree, SD= Strongly Disagree, μ:=Mean

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